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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHMFSS/39ABG INCIRLIK AB TU PRIORITY

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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHMFSS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RHMFSS/EUCOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//USDP:PDUSDP/ISA:EUR/ISA:NESA/DSCA// PRIORITY

RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU PRIORITY

RUEUITH/TLO ANKARA TU PRIORITY

RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEPGAB/MNF-I C2X BAGHDAD IZ PRIORITY

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: REACTION TO MILITARY STRIKES AGAINST PKK  
IN NORTHERN IRAQ

REF: A. ANKARA 2974 (NOTAL)

[1](#)B. ANKARA 2935

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Reaction to Turkish military air and artillery strikes (ref A) against PKK targets in northern Iraq early December 16 dominated Turkish media on December [1](#)17. President Gul, PM Erdogan, and other government officials praised the Turkish military's ability to carry out night-time raids on PKK encampments. GOT officials called on PKK terrorists to abandon their mountain hideouts, surrender to Turkish forces, and return home. They noted such military operations will continue as necessary. Most commentators pointed to the strikes as the first real operation against PKK targets in northern Iraq authorized by Turkey's parliament in October. Turkish media broadly credited the United States with supplying the intelligence required to make the operation a success, as well as with clearing Iraqi air space to avoid unintended conflict with friendly aircraft. Off-the-cuff damage assessments varied widely, with some Turkish officials claiming 75-80 percent of PKK command was destroyed. Media report the Iraqi government called in Turkish Ambassador Kanbay in Baghdad and passed a note verbale expressing concern about the report of one civilian having died in the bombardment and asked that they be halted. END SUMMARY

Official Reaction

[1](#)2. (SBU) PM Erdogan congratulated the Turkish General Staff (TGS) Chief of Defense, the force commanders, and the air force pilots for the successful airstrikes. Erdogan noted the GOT is determined to end the terrorist threat posed by the PKK through whatever means necessary, including military, economic, and social measures. During a live interview televised the evening of December 16, Chief of Defense Gen. Yasar Buyukanit said he felt proud of Turkey's armed forces, claiming that "all targets were hit" and adding that not a

single civilian or villager was hit. After many years, a very successful operation was carried out against PKK camps in northern Iraq. The PKKers may live in caves, but "we will find and hit them." It no longer matters whether it is summer or winter; operations will continue regardless of the season. Buyukanit said the PKK must watch its step from this point forward, claiming Turkey can watch PKK camps as though they are on "Big Brother." He added that by opening Iraqi airspace to the Turkish operation, the U.S. had approved the operation.

13. (SBU) Deputy Prime Minister and GOT spokesman Cemil Cicek emphasized in a December 16 statement that the sole target of the operation was the PKK. He appealed to PKK rank and file to abandon the organization, saying that they are not on the right path and will not succeed. He asked that they return to their parents while there is still time.

14. (SBU) Opposition politicians were reluctant to surrender the "weak on terrorism" card they have used against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). Republican People's Party (CHP) deputy leader and MP Onur Oymen said that using only the air force against PKK targets was not sufficient to wipe out the PKK threat and called on the government to carry out a comprehensive operation utilizing ground forces. Nationalist Action Party (MHP) deputy chairman Oktay Vural complained that the government had waited so long to carry out such an operation and pointed to rumors that PKK leaders had escaped the attacks. Pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) leaders were critical of the operation. DTP MP Fatma Kurtulan called on the GOT to cease operations in northern Iraq and focus instead on dialogue and solving differences through democratic means. DTP deputy chairman Selahattin Demirtas and Sirri Sakik both criticized

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PM Erdogan for raising the possibility of making changes to a "Return to Home" (repentance or amnesty) law to attract more PKKers to abandon their armed struggle, then striking out at them through a military operation a few days later. Sakik added, "Today we understood that this brotherhood project meant bombardment. You cannot resolve the issue by bombing here and there."

#### Media Reaction

15. (SBU) Media outlets uniformly characterized the strikes as a display of Turkish determination to deal with the PKK threat and its presence in northern Iraq. Many commentators termed the strikes as the first major operation since Turkey's parliament authorized the government to carry out such actions in late October. Most media reported the operation was comprised of both air and artillery strikes against PKK encampments along the Turkey-Iraq border as well as on PKK headquarters on Kandil Mountain, about 100 kilometers from the border. Some outlets carried reports of Iranian shelling of PKK camps at Kandil concurrent to the Turkish strikes, speculating the attacks had been coordinated ahead of time with Iran.

16. (SBU) A number of media claimed the United States authorized the attacks and credited the U.S. with providing the intelligence needed to carry out such attacks, as well as with clearing Iraqi airspace. The Embassy spokesperson was quoted widely, noting that Turkey did not seek approval from the U.S. for the operation but that Turkey had notified us beforehand. A State Department spokesman's December 16 statement that Turkey has the right to defend itself against terrorist attacks was also widely reported. "Radikal" columnist Murat Yetkin pointed out that cooperation between Turkey and the U.S. "is solving the PKK problem," both through military activity and a political approach via the "return-to-home" plan.

17. (SBU) Damage estimates from the attacks varied widely,

with some unnamed Turkish military sources claiming in media reports that 75-80 percent of the PKK's command and control operation at Kandil Mountain was destroyed. Some speculated that PKK leaders Murat Karayilan and Feyman Huseyin may have been killed in the attacks. A press release from PJAK claimed that the airstrikes led to the death of one civilian, with six more wounded. PJAK also claimed that several houses and a school were destroyed, along with 170 livestock. The PKK-affiliated Free Life of Kurdistan Party (PJAK) also pointed to Iranian artillery strikes around the same time that Turkey was carrying out its attack.

#### PKK Threat

18. (SBU) In a Firat News Agency (PKK mouthpiece) report, the PKK threatened the United States, noting that it was very clear the assaults had occurred with the "approval, confirmation, and intelligence assistance of the USA." The PKK statement calls on the U.S. to stop the attacks at once. Otherwise, America will attract our people's fear and response, and this may cause new developments.

#### Iraq Reaction

19. (SBU) Turkish media reported Iraqi Deputy FM Mohammed al-Hajj Humoud summoned Turkish Ambassador to Iraq Kanbay to the Foreign Ministry December 16. Humoud reportedly expressed concern about civilian casualties suffered during the airstrikes and demanded they be brought to an end before they "affect the friendly relations between the two

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governments and peoples."

110. (SBU) Some media outlets quoted GOI spokesperson Dr. Ali Dabbagh as supporting Turkish military operations in northern Iraq in an interview that took place several hours before the attacks. Dabbagh reportedly said that as long as the PKK continues to remain in northern Iraq and constitute a threat, there will be no way other than through a military operation for Turkey to respond. Dabbagh called the PKK a terrorist organization and said the GOI believes PM Erdogan does not wish to destroy Iraq. Dabbagh is quoted as saying, "We do not oppose a military operation against the PKK, but this should not be unilateral. Our concern is that these operations might expand. Our people should not get the impression that Turkey wants to occupy the Iraqi Kurdistan region."

111. (SBU) COMMENT: Considering the timing of these airstrikes in conjunction with proposals made by PM Erdogan on December 9 (ref B) and other GOT officials last week about making changes to existing repentance laws (Turkish Penal Code Article 221) for PKKers who surrender to Turkish forces, it appears the GOT is following a stick-and-carrot approach to solving the PKK problem and that it may indeed be coordinating closely with the Turkish military.

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WILSON